



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS

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GOVERNOR

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Governor Rell Signs Sweeping Education Reform Bill

'This is bold, visionary reform – and we are making it happen together'

Governor M. Jodi Rell today signed into law a bill that makes dramatic and fundamental improvements in Connecticut's public education system, legislation that was the product of a concerted effort by the Governor, legislators, the state Board of Education, teachers, business leaders and parents. The new law increases the number of credits required for high school graduation and requires students to pass exams in core subjects such as math, history, biology and English, while empowering parents, school boards and the state to step in when schools are failing.

"This new law raises academic criteria, boosts requirements for graduation and puts a much-needed emphasis on core areas of study such as math, science and technology," Governor Rell said during a signing ceremony at Hockanum School in East Hartford. "It gives new authority to stakeholders – including, for the first time, parents – to take decisive action when schools are letting students down. And it includes new – and rigorous – processes for tracking the performance of students, teachers, schools and districts.

"Today, we put in place standards and requirements that ensure Connecticut's students will be the best-educated and the best-prepared in the world," the Governor said. "Today, we chart a course for our schools, our teachers and most importantly, our students, that leads directly to the top. Technology has made us all neighbors; the global economy has made us all business partners. The world is now too small and the challenges now too great for us to settle for anything less than the very best for our children – *all* of our children, no matter where they go to school.

"I am also proud to say that this bill is the product of a bipartisan effort," Governor Rell said. "By having all of the interested parties – educators, unions, parents, students, legislators and others – together at the table, we end up with a far stronger result than any individual effort could produce. This is bold, visionary reform – and we are making it happen together."

Senate Bill 438, *An Act Concerning Education Reform in Connecticut*, increases the minimum credits required for high school graduation from 20 to 25 and gives greater emphasis to math, science and world languages, beginning with the Class of 2018 (that is, students who are fifth-graders this school year). It also requires every student to complete a “capstone project” – an independent demonstration project.

In addition, students will be required to pass end-of-year exams in algebra, geometry, biology, American history and 10th-grade English in order to graduate. The law also requires local boards of education to provide support to students – beginning in seventh grade – to help them meet these new standards.

Importantly, the new law also works to increase parental involvement. The law creates “Parent Governance Councils” to give parents and guardians a clear and essential role in decisions affecting school improvement in the state’s neediest schools.

“Students only succeed if their parents are their partners,” Governor Rell said. “The education of a child does not begin – or end – with morning and afternoon bells. It is a round-the-clock process.”

Under the new law, the state Board of Education will be able to replace local boards of education in low-achieving schools, while priority school districts – districts with the greatest academic need – will be able to convert existing schools to “innovation schools.” Innovation schools have special flexibility in curriculum, schedule, budget, staffing and other areas, and must be reviewed each year by the district superintendent.

The new law also enhances Connecticut’s chances to secure up to \$175 million in federal “Race to the Top” grant funding that rewards states for taking bold steps in education reform. Connecticut will file its application for the next round of Race to the Top grants on June 1.

Other provisions of the new law:

- Allow retired teachers to be rehired for up to one year in a shortage area or priority school district for up to 45 percent of the current maximum salary
- Eliminate enrollment caps for high-performing charter schools
- Require the state Board of Education to review and approve an alternate route for certification for school administrators
- Require all schools to hold parent-teacher conferences at least twice a year
- Require high schools to offer advanced placement courses for students to earn college credit
- Allow students to get credit toward graduation for on-line course work
- Allow out-of-school suspensions for students with a history of disciplinary problems
- Require schools with a dropout rate of 8 percent or higher to establish an on-line credit recovery program to help students earn needed credits